What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus Disease 2019, commonly known as COVID-19 or COVID, is a respiratory infection caused by the coronavirus Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 were first identified in the Wuhan Province in China in December 2019. Since then, the virus has spread rapidly around the world, causing a pandemic and hundreds of millions of infections.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can infect and cause disease in humans and animals. There are currently seven known types of coronaviruses that infect humans. Four of these are common and cause mild respiratory infections like the common cold. The remaining three types, which include SARS-CoV-2, cause more severe respiratory infections.

Who gets COVID-19?

The virus is highly contagious and anyone exposed can develop COVID-19 infection. Older adults and people who have certain underlying medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 infection.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets or small particles that contain the virus. This can happen while breathing, speaking, singing, or exercising. These droplets and particles can then be breathed in by another person, or they can land on their eyes, nose, or mouth. Sometimes, the infected person may contaminate surfaces they touch and others will become infected by touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with contaminated hands. People who are closer than six feet from an infected person are most likely to get infected.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 infection?

Illness from COVID-19 infection can range from no symptoms or very mild symptoms to severe illness that can result in hospitalization, intensive care, or death. The more common symptoms include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

While anyone can have symptoms, older adults and people with certain underlying medical

conditions (e.g., heart or lung disease or diabetes) have a higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19 illness. Symptoms of serious illness include:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds

How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?

Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus.

How are COVID-19 infections diagnosed?

Two types of viral tests are used to diagnose a current COVID-19 infection. A molecular test (also called RT-PCR) is used to detect the genetic material that makes up the virus. An antigen test is used to find specific proteins that are found on the surface of the virus. Both types of test can determine if you have an active COVID-19 infection. Molecular and antigen tests are usually performed by taking samples from the nose using long swabs. Your healthcare provider may determine whether to conduct tests for the virus based on your signs and symptoms, whether you have had close contact with an infected person, if you have a condition that puts you at high risk for illness, or if you are going to have a medical procedure. Tests can be performed in a laboratory, at a testing site, or in your own home.

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

At this time, there is no cure for COVID-19. However, not all patients with COVID-19 will require medical care in a hospital. Those with mild illness can recover at home with supportive care including rest, fluids, and treating symptoms with over-the-counter medication (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved one drug (Remdesivir) for the treatment of hospitalized patients. The FDA has also issued an emergency use authorization for several other drugs and treatments, including the use of monoclonal antibodies, in cases of COVID-19 in both adult and pediatric patients.

How can COVID-19 infection be prevented?

There are several strategies that should be followed to stop the spread of COVID-19.

- Get vaccinated against the virus. Fully vaccinated means two weeks or more have passed since getting the second dose of a two-dose vaccine (e.g.,Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or two weeks or more have passed since getting one dose of a single-dose vaccine (e.g., Johnson & Johnson/Janssen). This also applies to COVID-19 vaccine that has been authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization (e.g., AstraZeneca/Oxford).
    - If you have a condition or are taking medications that weaken your immune system, you may **not** be fully protected even if you are fully vaccinated. You should continue taking all precautions until your healthcare provider says you no longer need to.

- In certain situations, medication might be available for people who have been exposed to COVID-19 and have not yet developed symptoms.
- Practice physical distancing, especially if you are not fully vaccinated. Keep at least six feet between yourself and others.
- Wear a mask, especially if you are not fully vaccinated.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Clean surfaces that are touched often.

How can I learn more about COVID-19?

- If you have concerns about COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

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